

# Leicester Energy Action: our learnings



National Energy Action is the national fuel poverty charity, working to ensure that everyone in the UK can afford to live in a warm and safe home



Leicester Energy Action was funded by NHS Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, and worked in partnership with Public Health at Leicester City Council.



Between February 2023 and November 2024, we delivered one-to-one advice, community engagement and group advice sessions across the city. We also provided innovative educational opportunities in schools, and crucial training for frontline workers.

# Working with local and strategic partners to provide targeted, localised support



## Use local datasets

to identify areas of high need (such as deprivation, fuel poverty and poor health).



## Identify allies

in key sectors (like health and public health) who understand the impact of cold homes and fuel poverty upon health, and who are well placed to implement a process of systematic change to tackle local health inequalities.



## Find where

you can work in partnership with others to reach common goals and achieve shared aims. Articulate the things you have in common in a way that is meaningful to those partners.



## Embedding yourself

in a local area often requires a local presence. Someone who can reach out, network, and make personal connections on the ground.

That doesn't just happen within one single window or through a few connections – your local presence needs to be ongoing, flexible and able to diversify approaches and engagement techniques. It also needs to be visible.



## Align actions

to address need with key local strategies and plans (like a public health or fuel poverty strategy) when engaging local authorities and health bodies like the NHS.



## Take time

to understand the systems, practices and tools that are used by key allies and gate keepers (such as health sector funders or partners).

Gaining an in-depth understanding of data sharing opportunities (and having a clear understanding of local limitations for this) at programme outset can help you to identify how to best build a successful referral mechanism early on.



## Take advantage

of local networks that you can tap into and through which you can grow your contacts. Be open to working with different kinds of partners and always have in mind how you could help those that they support (and vice versa). Help them to see the co-benefits of working with you.



## Reach

those who can be challenging to engage by building strong relationships with partners who are already working with them and are trusted.



Building trust (with partners and clients) can take time. To make use of a service, people need to have confidence in it. Maximise the opportunities that early engagement can bring to demonstrate your commitment and perseverance. Evidence your good practice and share it. Be open and honest. Be ready to help.

# Delivering high quality support and achieving the right outcomes



**Take the time** to understand the work that your referral partners carry out, and how they do it. Use opportunities to maximise contact, engagement and support for clients through partners, and to reduce duplication of effort.

If a partner carries out home visits, for example, they could assist with the completion of paperwork and submission of evidence while at a property.

Use opportunities to act through a single point of contact, to avoid overwhelming clients who may be vulnerable or likely to disengage.



**Be clear** on the scope and nature of support that will be provided through the project. Is it straightforward energy advice? Is it casework? Is it advocacy?

Deciding upon and understanding the nature of the support that is to be delivered can help inform your targeting approach, the type of referral relationships you develop, and the nature of outcomes you look to achieve for clients.

It can also help with capacity planning, and set staff expectations around how much time they are able to spend with a client and the depth of support they can provide.



**Aligning different models** of support provision within a project can help to reach different groups with varying levels of need/vulnerability in the most effective way.

For example, employing outreach techniques to deliver accessible advice within a community, while being able to refer through to in-depth casework via professionals for those who need additional/the most help.

The format and nature of support that you focus on should inform and be reflected in the size and extent of any target-based performance criteria placed upon a project.



**Take an open and person-centred approach** to the delivery of advice. Take time to ask questions that will help you to understand what is going on and how it is affecting someone. Avoid judgement. Be empathetic. Tease out the issues at play.

At the same time, understand and be clear on your organisational boundaries. Assess which of their issues you can support with directly, and where you may need to harness your local networks to put them in touch with the right agencies instead.

Ensuring that your service can advocate for clients can help make sure those who are vulnerable or unlikely to reach out/communicate by themselves can still access meaningful outcomes. Such models can have long lasting impact on confidence and capabilities, adding to the longevity of support.



**Understanding the communities** where you are working and ensuring you have the tools at hand to enable equal opportunities for engagement can make a huge difference to client advocacy.

For example, if you are working in communities where there are language barriers, ensure your service has adequate access to translation and interpretation services.

Incorporate assessments of client need and capabilities into onward referrals processes. Where clients are felt to require additional support to schedule and confirm appointments, ensure that this can be built into your processes to guarantee a high quality and successful referrals.

Taking the time to understand clients as people can help you to identify how to provide advice and support in the best and most effective way possible, to ensure meaningful outcomes and longer-lasting impacts.

Employing local people means you can maximise and build upon local connections – to generate referrals and to make referrals yourself. To engage with clients on the basis of shared community.

# Raising standards and standardising behaviours through education and training

## Build capacity



among the partners and stakeholders that you engage across a local area through training and education. This can help to raise and standardise the support landscape of a locality and improve the confidence and ability of different actors to give advice on key issues. This can in turn help to alleviate capacity demands on your own service, freeing up time to spend on the most vulnerable and most complex cases.

## Aligning



your training offering with the local networks that you are working with to deliver direct support can help to generate high quality referrals and embed your service even further. This will also allow you to direct diverse training offerings (such as professional qualifications) to where they will make the most difference to both organisational practice and infrastructure.

## Develop



educational offerings for schools that are tailored in ways that can be linked to National Curriculum and Schemes of Work objectives. This will help to make the opportunities you are offering a more viable and attractive activity for school partners to engage with.

## Encourage



strategic and standardised approaches to the issues you want to tackle by encouraging and enabling networks of practitioners to come together – for example, by establishing a ‘Let’s Talk Energy group’ for energy advice partners across a locality.

## Link



your education offering with localised education networks and settings, securing buy-in from engaged individuals who can help recommend and promote what you have to offer. Cultivate positive relationships with partners to build trust with others in the sector. Take advantage of existing relationships and engagement routes held by gatekeeper allies (such as public health or local authorities).



Think about how your educational outreach work can align with your support service delivery. Identifying households and families in need through educational activities, and providing mechanisms through which they can access support if needed. Capitalise on the ability of education to increase knowledge and cascade energy advice directly into homes via young people and children.